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ABSTRACT

Three types of materials are included in this presentation on educational communications public relations. An outline listing ideas and considerations designed as a discussion guide covers four major topics: (1) public relations; (2) general publicity and press releases; (3) specific publicity; and (4) additional aspects of public relations. The first person is used to encourage active participation by the reader. A checklist presents tasks and decisions involved in developing a public relations project and can be adapted to fit specific needs; checkpoints include the main topic, audience, media, date, basic facts, and audiovisual materials. A bibliography lists 20 books and one journal published from 1960 through 1977 on public relations and mass communications. (KP)

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EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS PUBLIC RELATIONS: ONE PERSON'S THOUGHTS

Warren A. Boyd, Jr.

IR 005 141

Model Secondary School for the Deaf

Gallaudet College

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(These materials originally were presented at the April 1977 national convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology.)

Dear Colleague:

Welcome to the "Showcase for Excellence."

CONTENTS

- Outline: "Educational Communications Public Relations: One Person's Thoughts"
- Public Relations Checklist
- Selected Bibliography

PURPOSE

The outline has been prepared for use as a discussion guide and as a list of ideas and considerations. It is not all-inclusive. It hopefully touches upon your thoughts and concerns..."some of the things I wanted to know about public relations but was afraid to ask."

The first-person is used to put you in the action seat as you read the outline.

The checklist is an organization of decisions and tasks when working on a possible public relations project. It can be adapted to fit your needs and situation.

The bibliography includes publications on public relations and mass communications.

Cordially,

Warren A. Boyd, Jr.

Warren A. Boyd, Jr.
Instructional Developer

Attachments

E1F

EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS PUBLIC RELATIONS:
ONE PERSON'S THOUGHTS

SHOWCASE FOR EXCELLENCE, 1977 AECT Convention
Miami Beach, Florida

I. General

A. P.R. can be said to stand for Performance and Recognition. I must have a well-organized, well-administered program before I even consider "selling" it. I must be able to perform before I can be recognized.

B. Public relations is "the planned effort to influence opinion through acceptable performance based upon two-way communication." (Cutlip, 3rd ed., 1963) A more complete definition from "Public Relations News":

> Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance. (as quoted by Cutlip, 1963)

C. P.R. includes:

1. Publicity
2. Press relations
3. Institutional advertising
4. Community relations
5. Employee relations
6. Publications

All of the above comprise the institutional or corporate image.

I must choose priorities, according to my institution and its particular mandate.

D. Public relations must start at home; then I can work my way outward into other publics.

This means:

1. Satisfied, productive employees who feel they are contributing and being heard. Such employees exude positive attitudes.

2. An educated, well-served constituency, including (but not limited to):

   a. Students

   b. Faculty or co-workers

Such word-of-mouth communication is far more effective than any news release or advertisement.

E. I must keep P.R. in perspective and must plan it as I would any activity or goal I wish to accomplish.

1. How much time and effort will I devote to public relations?

2. What is the purpose of my P.R. activities? (See II.B. below.)

3. How can I affect the positive and negative forces impacting upon the program?

4. What avenues of feedback are available to me?

F. Like education, public relations is a communication system which analyzes its audience and tailors its message and media as needed. It also seeks feedback and revises its system as necessary.

G. Elihu Katz's "Two-Step Flow of Communication" (Schramm, 1960)

I can reach

"opinion leaders" who, in turn, pass on what they read and hear to those of their everyday associates for whom they are influential.

H. If I go out with "puffery," I shall lose my credibility with the "gate-keepers" and will have much less chance of getting any messages communicated in the future. ("The media person who cried 'wolf' . . .")

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I. IMPORTANT -- Public relations regulations

Almost all educational institutions and corporations have regulations regarding public relations--especially press relations (all contacts with the news media) and publications.

I must be sure that I'm aware of my employer's regulations on P.R. and follow them. If not, I can seriously damage my employer's public image and lose invaluable internal support.

****

J. If at all possible, I should go to the "pro."

Whatever the position is called (Vice President of Development/External Relations; Director of Public Relations/Public Information/Public Affairs; etc.), the person occupying it is responsible for all aspects of my institution's public relations program. Part of the institution, I must work as part of the team.

If such a person is available, I should ask him/her for advice and assistance on my public relations activities. (How this P.R. professional can help is illustrated below, particularly in II.D.)

II. Getting "the word" out: Publicity/Press Relations (General)

A. What (word)?

Stress how it will help the learners, the teachers, the school system, etc. "What's in it for You."

1. New service offered to my clientele

2. Expanded services offered to new clientele (This new clientele must be told what is available to them and how it will help them.)

3. New equipment or software allowing you to provide new, expanded services

4. Local, state or national recognition for our program, people or facility

5. General developments in Instructional Development/Educational Technology (ID/ET) (Important: "localize" these developments.)

B. Why (do I think this is so important)?

This should be answered simultaneously with "What?"

1. Is it important? (I should be as objective as possible and ask others for their reactions.)

2. Is it important enough to:

   a. spend my time?

   b. ask others to spend time?

   c. expect readers and listeners--the intended audience--to receive it?

      (1) Will they read it?

(2) Will they listen and/or watch it on the electronic media?

C. How? Via what media?

This will depend on the news item, the institution by which I am employed and the media at my disposal. (The list below is divided by type of institution. The entries are interchangeable and not restricted.)

1. Elementary-secondary school

   a. Student newspaper

   b. PTA, Lions Club, other civic groups

   c. School events, functions

   d. Faculty-staff newsletters, bulletins

   e. AV/Library/Resource Center club (or committee)

   f. Radio/TV talk and "phone-in" shows

   g. Local news media (radio, TV, newspapers)

   h. "Director of Public Affairs" (or similar title) in superintendent's or board's office

   Vehicles a. through g. are routed through h.

2. Community college/college/university

   a. Student newspaper

   b. Alumni publications

   c. Alumni meetings

   d. Faculty-staff newsletters, bulletins

   e. Local news media

   f. State, national news services (e.g. Associated Press, state press association)

   g. Office of Public Information

   Vehicles a., d., e. and f. are routed through g. For b. and c., check with the campus alumni office.

3. Industry

   a. Employee newspaper, bulletins

   b. Local, state, national media

c. Speakers' bureau

d. Director of public relations

Vehicles a., b. and c. are routed through d.

D. Who (gets the message to the media)?

The P.R. professional or me? In almost all instances, I should leave this task to the public relations professional.

- This person does this daily and knows the mass media, their people, tastes, needs and respective definitions of "news."
- The image of my institution can suffer if there is no coordination. (Many educational technologists stress the need for a "coordinated media/instructional development program." The same is true for a public relations program.)
- The P.R. person is an excellent one for discussing ideas and their probability of getting used. This person also has established contacts in the mass (and specialized) media. I should take advantage of this.

1. Common considerations in working with the P.R. person and news media representatives:

a. I should establish personal contact with the person before asking for the placement of a story/news item. During this meeting, I could find out what s/he needs, the format, what types of stories might be accepted. I can give some ideas and ask for reaction.

b. With the P.R. professional, it's more likely that I'll be able to see (approve or disapprove) the story before it's sent out.

With the news media representative, there is almost no chance of this. They may call to double-check a few things, but that's it. Therefore, it is imperative that I have my facts straight (in writing or in the interview) and be sure I get them across clearly and concisely.

*** If I bomb, it's my head. In this type of situation, the P.R. pro is an excellent buffer. Take advantage of it.

c. Use a soft sell approach. P.R. people and media representatives almost always are turned off by hard-sell. ("This is the GREATEST story since Neil Armstrong landed on the moon! You gotta' run it!)

d. I should be direct and honest. If I don't have the answer or complete information, I should tell him/her, "I'll find out and get back to you by _____." (give a time or date)

e. Be efficient. I shouldn't sit around and chat. I should discuss the topic at hand and not wander (unless they want to cover other subjects).

I must remember that they are busy professionals, too.

f. I must keep a proper perspective. It sometimes will be hard for me to convince a P.R. person, an editor or a reporter of the importance of a story idea. In their eyes--and in the eyes of the audience (as judged by the media or P.R. person) --the idea might not be worth using.

g. I must remember that they have many other areas to cover and other demands. They are concerned with college president's speeches, droughts, the legislature, famine, sports scores, institutional reorganization, property taxes, ad nauseum.

h. If I don't place this story idea, I can ease future contacts by compromising or losing gracefully and in an understanding manner.

2. Working with the P.R. person.

a. Usually, I should have something in writing--e.g., a draft story, a fact sheet or outline. However, I initially should ask what s/he wants. This can vary by the event (story idea) and the time demands upon the P.R. office.

b. Even with something in writing, I realize that the P.R. person may have questions or want clarification on some points. This is no reflection on my writing (reporting skills); this is just part of the P.R. person's job. After all, his/her reputation is on the line with the working press.

c. How and when do I contact him/her about these stories? This depends on our relationship, how s/he likes to work.

(1) By telephone and then send the draft/outline?

(2) Carry it in person and allow time for review and clarification?

(3) Have him/her stop by to get the story? (This would be helpful if I had, for instance, a new facility or piece of equipment.)

3. Contacting the media myself.

Direct contact is okay as long as I inform my P.R. office completely about my intent and content.

a. Have something in writing but--again--know what the person wants. If unable to contact the reporter in advance, take a fact sheet.

b. With the press, there is more likelihood that they will write

their own stories, hence less chance that I'd have to write one. Some journalists have an aversion to publicity handouts.

c. With a journalist, I can expect to play the role of interviewee more than with a P.R. person.

d. Topic 2 applies here, too.

E. Who (is the audience)?

1. The general public?

2. Other media professionals?

3. The School Board? Board of Trustees? Administration?

4. Faculty/staff within my district or college?

5. Students?

6. Other special groups?

F. When?

1. What's the best time for this story to get out? Ask the P.R. professional for counsel.

a. Should it be an "advance"?

b. Should I wait until I'm sure the idea is established, accepted or working before I promote a story on it?

2. What are the time constraints of others involved? When does the P.R. person (or the media representative) have to have the story or have to talk with me so it can be in the paper or on the air by a certain date?

G. Where?

1. Geographically, where do I want the information to be disseminated?

2. Is the news item of national, statewide, regional or local interest?

3. In what type of publications, on what programs or on what stations would I be most likely to reach the target audience?

III. Getting "the word" out: Publicity/Press Relations (Specific)

This section deals with news releases: (a) general comments pertaining to both print and broadcast; (b) print; (c) broadcast; (d) the fact sheet.

A. General comments

1. Write in good English, using good grammar. I should avoid "Educationese" and technical jargon.

2. Use short, complete sentences.

3. Type doublespace (sometimes triplespace for print).

4. The most important information (most important to the intended audience) should be presented first and the other essential facts --Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?--should be given as early in the story as possible. (Most stories are written in the order of descending importance.)

5. I MUST BE ACCURATE. Spell names correctly. Have dates, times and locations correct. If in doubt about someone's title, address or any other fact, I should check it out. When in doubt, I should provide more facts than necessary. It's easier to delete them than to try to dig them up later.

6. In both the print and electronic media, there are hard news and feature stories.

   a. Hard news: Usually short, to the point.

   b. Feature: Longer than hard news; more flexibility but still demands tight writing. Organization is more critical.

B. Story for print

1. Keep the paragraphs short--3 or 4 sentences maximum in most instances.

2. Basic journalism books and style books (e.g., Associated Press's) are available to help me write a news story.

3. Am I writing the story for a newspaper or magazine? If the latter, the story can be somewhat longer and provide more information in more detail. Closer to a "feature" than "hard news."

   Descending importance is a key concept. When editors edit, they "lop" off at the end rather than go through the story to selectively edit it paragraph by paragraph. Therefore, it is important that my last paragraphs are the "most expendable."

C. Broadcast story

1. Compared to print media, broadcasting uses a conversational style --similar to a person speaking.

   (This is what happens: Sally X. Newscaster or Charles A. Announcer is going to read that story aloud to the listening or viewing audience.)

   The difference between print and non-print styles isn't as great as it once was; newspaper style has become more conversational in recent years--largely due to broadcast journalism's influence.

2. I shouldn't count on getting very much air time. Therefore, my story probably won't get much more than 20 seconds to be read. Depending on my typewriter margains, this might mean as few as 5 or 6 lines of copy.

3. Is this story being sent to television stations? If so, do I have visuals to support the story? Does the script indicate the visuals?

D. Fact sheet

I should use logical, clearly marked organization and be sure it includes all facts without belaboring them. The "General Comments" (III.A.) apply here.

IV. Other aspects of public relations

Public relations is not limited to news releases. There are other positive steps I can take to enhance the image of Instructional Development/Educational Technology or my program.

Many of my department's activities affect others' views of my roles and responsibilities.

Below is a partial list of things I should consider in order to effect a positive image for my role within the organization and our department.

A. Speak before groups.

B. Participate in civic, church activities. (Lawyers, doctors and other professionals place great importance on "contacts" gained through civic groups and clubs.)

C. Assist student groups and others in making posters, taking photography or whatever my services and talents can provide.

D. Involve various publics' members in the evaluation and selection of materials.

E. Conduct classes in basic graphics for senior citizens, other adults.

F. If not in conflict with school policy, make the Resources Center available to others.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS CHECKLIST

1. Main topic or story idea:

2. Is the story important? (Yes) (No) If "Yes," why is it important?

3. To whom (audience) is it important?

4. Media to be used:

   ____ Speech/presentation

   ____ Newspaper

   ____ Radio

   ____ Television

   ____ Magazine

   ____ Professional publication

   ____ Workshop

   ____ Other (Specify):

(more)

5. _____ Date the story is to be released or presented.

   Advance release date (if applicable):

   _____

6. Basic facts:

   "Newspeg" or lead information:

   Who:

   What:

   When:

   Where:

   Why:

   How:

   Other:

7. Audio-visual

   _____ Photography

   _____ Transparencies

   _____ Prints

   _____ Cinematography

   _____ Graphics/art work

   _____ Audio tape

   _____ Other (Specify):

   _____ None

8. _____ Contact P.R. Director (or appropriate person) for guidance and assistance.

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